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Marketing and Resisting Plastic Surgery: heteroglossic voices in the multimodal construction of female identity[*]

Abstract

Contemporary consumer culture tends to see personal appearance as the crucial symbolic capital whereby an individual can assert her/his own identity as a member of a socially recognized community. The orders of discourse (as sites of articulated discursive formations, Fairclough 1992: 10, 43 *et passim*) which naturalize surgical intervention as a means to erase one's ethnic origins while conforming to globalized Western (viz. US) standards of beauty, dialogically engage with voices arguing for the preservation of one's physical traits as anchors of traditional culture, ideology and self-identity. This paper explores multimodal strategies of female identity construction and positioning as enacted through bank loans and advertisements for plastic (viz. cosmetic, as opposed to reconstructive) surgery with particular reference to non-Western countries and, more specifically, to Lebanon as a paradigmatic case in point. At the same time, it compares such globalizing, centripetal strategies with the 'localizing', heteroglossic voices of online communities of Lebanese women who contrast and resist such dominant discourse practices. They do so by 'advertising' for real beauty and encouraging the others to build their social capital on their ethnic and cultural origins and to promote their own real selves, while strategically monitoring the potential negative consequences that this might entail, including shame, stigma and social exclusion. Against the backdrop of an intersemiotic approach integrating multimodal and discourse-as-mediated-action studies, the paper investigates "the role of the market in shaping a habitus of agency-as-choice" (Kress 2010: 132) and ultimately advocates for shifting the focus of analysis from the individuals involved in communication to social action and social change.

1. The female body in modern society

In hypermodernity, defined by Varga (2005: 209) as the present state of advanced Western societies, technologically driven procedures for human reproduction, for curing illnesses but also for cosmetic changes are ever more intrusive in manipulating the body as a surface on which meanings can be inscribed. In the XIX century, sociocultural constructs such as the "healthy/morbid", "normal/pathological" oppositions were the yardstick for informed discourse on groups and societies, race, or 'psychological life' (Foucault [1963] 2003: 41). Presently, a 'mitigated', 'modernized' version of these constructs, together with the increasing medicalization of society (Illich 1976) and technologization of the 'virtual' body, may account for a more dynamic conception of the individual body: not as an object but as an *event* (Budgeon 2003: 35), a "project of the self" (Giddens 1991: 218 *et passim*), or a 'commodified'[1] entity which can be manipulated, rejuvenated and constantly redefined by the individual. In its turn, this 'fluid' conception of the body is in line with the modern conception of human social identities as "indeterminate, situational rather than permanent, dynamically and interactively constructed" (Duszak 2002: 2-3), but most importantly *performed*, through socio-psychological and discursive negotiation. More specifically,

> far from being fixed or subjective, the concept of identity is set on a cline − a visual metaphor which [adequately] captures its fluidity − and at the crossroads of (our own as well as others'): projects of the self

[1] Cf. Giddens's (1991) notion of 'the commodification of the self', suggesting that "consumers become the mere subjects of the force of consumption, fashioning themselves into a kind of product" (Benwell, Stokoe 2006: 170).

> as a pre-discursive, personal construct; products of the social (viz. situational and discursive) context; and embodiments of ideology as the wider system of cultural meaning-making agreed on in any given socio-historic community. In other words, doing identity work derives from, and has a direct bearing on both the private and the public spheres (Vasta, Caldas-Coulthard 2009: 3).

Exercising control over the body would seem to allow greater freedom of individual choice. In fact, this sociocultural meaning-making process inevitably takes places within the wider context of social norms and regulations: in Foucaultian terms (Foucault 1978: 30), 'the soul [has become] the prison of the body', in the sense that "the regulation and discipline of the body are carried out not only by coercion but also by establishing ideals and norms of 'normalcy', health or the desirable body. […] Disciplining the body, optimizing its capabilities, increasing its usefulness, submitting it to economic controls means exercising power over individuals" (Varga 2005: 224), while fostering a dynamic tension towards an ideal (and, for that matter, unattainable) standard of perfection.

In Bourdieu's view (1984), the "unfinished body" expresses social differentiation and is integral to the maintenance of social inequalities. Bourdieu's concepts of *social location, habitus* and *taste* (*ibid.*) are crucial in this context: *social location* refers to the class-based conditions that determine an individual's life conditions; *habitus* is formed by the social location and manifests itself in the body and the way people treat their body; and *taste* refers to the processes through which individuals make their lifestyle choices – under the influence and/or constraints of the first two factors. In post- and hypermodern societies the body has become commodified as a form of social capital, or, more pessimistically, as "the last remaining seat of individual control over one's own self" (Varga 2005: 229), for either singling-out or affiliation/mingling purposes. A good case in point is tattooing as a means to distinguish oneself from the others or, conversely, to establish social acceptance and get a feeling of community and belonging to a specific group.[2]

Against this backdrop, while the dominant classes still define taste – which is often imitated and therefore appropriated –, mass (or pop) culture and the media produce a levelling, globalizing effect on taste and, ultimately, on aesthetic standards and norms of desirability: "media texts erase the divide between private and public […and] dramatize the symbols, narratives and cultural codes of a particular society" (Alexander, Jacobs 1998: 27). They rely on the power of mediatized rituals to "sustain and/or mobilize collective sentiments and solidarities on the basis of symbolization and a subjunctive orientation to what should or ought to be" (Cottle 2006: 415). This is conveyed mainly through images, symbols, the creation of 'public opinion' about appearance[3] and, in the context of the present treatment, through "gender displays" (Goffman 1976) or, more precisely, gender performances. Gender and other aspects of identity are conceived of as co-constructed and interactively performed in and through culture-specific discursive representations and visual display. Identity construction and positioning are therefore located at the interface of the person and the social (Goffman 1959: 245) and continuously negotiated, rather than taken as given, within and through group affiliations which simultaneously tend to marginalize/expel what is alien, abnormal or 'impure'[4].

Mediatized discourses of the female body are grounded on ideologies of commodified femininity (Benwell, Stokoe 2006) which, at this point in time, construct and construe the female

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[2] Baudrillard's remarks (1998: 61) may be helpful in explaining the paradox inherent in post-modern consumer culture: "You never consume the object in itself (in its use-value); you are always manipulating objects [including your own body] … as signs which distinguish you either by affiliating you to your own group taken as an ideal reference or by marking you off from your group by reference to a group of higher status".

[3] See Giddens's (1991) notion of "self-reflexive identity construction", which includes both lifestyle and the body: "within this self-reflexive project, people remake themselves in relation to 'available' versions: perfection, or the 'best version' is pursued. […] 'Self' becomes a projection grounded in self-orientation and, most importantly, self-control […], which becomes a crucial feature of 'coping'. It offers some relief from the 'ontological insecurity' which, for him, is the *Zeitgeist* of late consumer capitalism" (Frost 2005: 68).

[4] See Goffman's work on stigmatization, defined as "a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity from which [the person] is reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discredited one" (Goffman 1963: 12). Also see 'othering' as defined by S. Hall 1997: 234-8; Duszak 2002: 2.

body as 'inadequate' or 'deficient' and therefore needing to be 'worked on' in a process of constant transformation (Davis 1995, 2002) based on the presupposed connection between 'cosmetic' change and 'inner' change. Such ideologies of passivization, fragmentation and reification reflect and perpetuate (male-driven) power relations prescribing the 'norm' (i.e. what it is to be a woman at a certain point in time and in a given sociocultural context). At the same time, they rely on the ideology of envy (Benwell, Stokoe 2006: 172), sustained by differential or limited access to the possibilities of constructing self and lifestyle to one's own (as well as society's) requirements: this is an aspect which should not be neglected in the present discussion, but one which is partially overcome, as we shall see, through the ever greater availability of financial resources, e.g. bank loans. And since "mediatized discourses, reinforced through intertextual/intersemiotic practice, possess an enormous naturalizing power, […it is] imperative constantly to trace the invisible non-conforming scripts and the silenced or marginalized voices, the strategies to oil them out or to make them functional" (Cortese 1999: 4).

With this aim in mind and from within a socio-semiotic perspective (Halliday 1994; Martin, White 2005), it seems in order, here, to adopt a multimodal interactional framework for analysis (Scollon, Scollon 2003; Norris, Jones 2005; Baldry, Thibault 2006; Kress 2010) which shifts the focus of attention from representation (Kress, van Leeuwen 1996; O'Halloran 2004) to interaction and materiality, namely to discourse as mediated action. Such a framework, laying a strong emphasis on the notions of agency and situated identity performance, will be complemented by a critical discourse approach (Fairclough 1989, 1992, 2006; Lemke 2003) which tackles the crucial issues of power, power asymmetry, inclusion/exclusion and social control in the era of globalization.

2. Stigmatization and normalization: ideologies of commodified femininity in Western and non-Western countries and Lebanon as a paradigmatic case in point.

> In the affluent West, there is a tendency for the body to be seen as an entity which is in the process of becoming: a *project* which should be *worked at* and *accomplished* as part of an individual's self-identity, […which] entails accepting that its appearance, size, shape and even its contents, are potentially open to reconstruction in line with the designs of its owner […]. This involves a practical recognition of the *significance of bodies*; both as personal resources and as *social symbols* which give off messages about a person's *self-identity*. In this context, bodies become malleable entities which can be shaped and honed by the vigilance and hard work of their owners. (Shilling 1993: 5, my italics).

By the same token, as Justine Coupland aptly reminds us (2003; 2007: 38), "the face is a semiotic space for self-identification [...and] beautiful bodies are, overall, presumed to be young bodies". A strong "cultural preoccupation with ageing, its effect on facial appearance and how this effect can be 'remedied'" (*loc. cit.)* is promoted: the woman's face and body, in particular, as targets of the male gaze,[5] are seen as deficient, flawed and always in need of 'repair' to maintain physical desirability.[6] This "matrix of beliefs" (*loc. cit.*) works on the ideological presupposition that, on the one hand, ageing is to be seen as pathological and that, on the other, scientized solutions, including surgical intervention and beauty products presented as farmaceutical rather than cosmetic,

[5] Men look and women exhibit (or are exhibited, as "the necessary insignia of male status/affluence", Cortese 1999: 17).
[6] This continues to be the 'norm' as far as femininity is concerned, although the hypermodern, revised version of masculinity – in the form of the "metrosexual man" (a term coined by Mark Simpson in *The Independent* as early as 1994) – also promotes a man who attends to bodily self-presentation and grooming and "who must simultaneously work on and discipline [his] body while disavowing any (inappropriate) interest in [his] own appearance" (Gill et al. 2005: 37).

are to be normalized and naturalized (i.e. socially legitimated)[7] – in more recent times, even as applies to men.[8]

However, the growth of global communications and visual media has reduced the category of 'normal' and imposed, even in non-Western countries, an internalized standard of desirability which tends to coincide with "the dominant white, [Euro-American] ideal of feminine beauty" (Davis 2002: 51), and which, in Korea for example (Kim 2003: 103), is "encapsulated by the increasingly popular Eurasian look". "The experience of the individual who cannot produce the 'normal' social identity required […] is that of being discredited" (Frost 2005: 80). More specifically, "while hegemonic groups perpetuate their own discursive representation of the social world and sanction its credibility, other groups deploy their own discursive practices to challenge the dominant ideological frame and its value construals […]. Thus, power asymmetry will produce the 'new', the 'marginal', 'oppositional' or 'alternative' against the 'given' discourse" (Cortese 2008: 356): dialectically engaging in discourse as mediated action, the two sets of "differently positioned social actors 'see' and represent social life in different ways, different discourses" (Fairclough 2001: 233).

And yet, in our case, what is 'dominant' – and thus discursively represented as 'normal', or as part of "possible 'imaginaries' which may come to be inculcated as new ways of being, new identities" (*ibid*: 235) – seems to rest on an anomaly, i.e. the hybridization of one's own cultural/ethnic traits and simultaneous affiliation with the cosmopolitan (viz. Western-ideal referenced) global community which is defined in terms of the activity of consuming global goods and services. What is more, the dominant habitus is one whose cultural capital is tied to "appearance as the prime arbiter of value and [which] sees self-development above all in terms of display" (Giddens 1991: 198), a point which shall be expanded upon below.

In a cross-cultural perspective, undergoing plastic surgery in the West, albeit not unanimously stigmatized[9], tends to be confined to the private sphere – ideally, at least[10]. In some non-Western societies, conversely, the same experience is 'resemiotized' (Iedema 2003: 41) as public discourse, through modes and channels of communication which globally and somehow coercively engage the audience, with no possibility of 'opting out': this is the case especially in Lebanon, the most westernized among middle-Eastern countries, where discourses on plastic surgery are 'emplaced' (Scollon, Scollon 2003) in street posters and billboards – somehow transgressively or deviantly, to the Western observer's eye[11] – as an experience to be collectively shared and to boast about (see the analysis of Figs. 3 and 4, respectively, in the next section): the ideology impinging upon these discursive practices is that "within the context of particular cultural mores and social norms, subjects must actively construct and reconstruct an appropriate appearance. *How* they do this allows some sense of a (prescribed) agency; *that* they do it is determined" (Frost 2005: 82), i.e. suggested as established common sense.

In keeping with the high-contexting (or collectivistic) practices (Hall 1976: 85-103 *et passim*) in which the Lebanese culture can be historically inscribed, group cohesion/conformity and mutual

[7] For an illuminating analysis of beauty product advertisements from popular magazines, see Coupland 2003. For a comparison of the discursive strategies used in male- and female-targeted beauty products, see Coupland 2007.

[8] See Davis's (2002) penetrating analysis of the different attitudes towards, and strategies adopted in, marketing cosmetic surgery for men.

[9] In Spain, the country with the highest rate of cosmetic surgery in Europe, the Zapatero administration passed a law which bans, at least within the 6am-10pm 'protected' broadcasting time, TV commercials "promoting the rejection of one's own image, fostering marginalization/social exclusion due to physical appearance, or praising fitness practices as conducive to desirable weight or look" (Orighi 2010, my translation).

[10] Even in the West there are of course numerous TV programmes and reality shows devoted to this topic (e.g. *Extreme Makeover, Make Me Perfect, 10 Years Younger, Dr. Ray 90210*, etc.), but the decision whether to watch them ultimately rests with the audience, and the action is performed within the private sphere of their homes.

[11] "The way in which orders of discourse are structured, and the ideologies which they embody, are determined by relationships of power in particular social institutions, and in the society as a whole. We therefore need to be sensitive […] to properties of the society and institutions we are concerned with" (Fairclough 1989: 28) in order to adjust our inevitably self-centered interpretation to the contingencies of the situation/context at issue and to accommodate apparent inconsistencies in the meaning-making process.

dependence are paramount. As a result of globalization, such traditional cultural values are reframed to accommodate the Western (low-context, individualistic) cultures' dictates of materialism, self-reliance and success (Walker Anderson 1997). In other words, abiding by the Euro-American 'norm' is not simply 'normalized', but appropriated and integrated into the historical habitus of collectivism. Thus, it becomes a social glue, i.e. a vehicle to social integration and recognition – in terms of status, power and value – within one's community of practice.[12]

Patently clashing with this ideological stance is the model proposed by "ANAdiva [liter. *I am a diva*]. The Alternative Role Model", a web community of Lebanese women who, in the words of the founder, Gwen Abou Jaoude, foster "a dialogue that celebrates the individuality of Lebanese women and encourages them to think beyond drastic physical alterations".[13] This web community promotes values in contrast to the mainstream hybridization of ethnic features and fosters the preservation of the Lebanese cultural identity. Their motto, derived from a successful signature event organized for the ANAdiva awareness campaign of 2009, is "be yourself or everyone else", singling out a real 'diva' (i.e. a "woman with character, wit and a well-defined identity", a woman who "[is her own] star"[14]) from the group of 'others'. However, as we shall see in the next section, although ostensibly promoting an 'anti-commercial'/'anti-consumption' impulse (Baudrillard 1998: 91), even the marginal, oppositional or "alternative" voices of the ANAdiva e-community tend to incorporate/accommodate conflicting hegemonic discourses, rather than to explicitly challenge them by openly condemning plastic surgery. In keeping with the "affective-intuitive, relationship-oriented" (as opposed to "line-logic", "problem-oriented") style of argument (Ting-Toomey 1985; Walker Anderson 1997; Vasta 1999) which is typical of high-context cultures such as the Lebanese one, ANAdiva's main discursive focus is on engaging the addressee not so much in a straightforward, rational argument against a debatable sociocultural 'norm' which legitimates plastic surgery, but rather in the attitudinally-loaded discursive construction of an alternative female identity based on self-awareness and freedom of choice.

It is to a necessarily sketchy multimodal investigation into these heteroglossic discursive practices that the analysis will now turn.

3.Multimodal discursive practices in marketing and resisting plastic surgery

In Lebanon, plastic surgery has become part and parcel of daily life. "In a country where there are five women for each man, finding a husband has turned into a real fight, waged by means of lingerie and scalpel" (my translation, *Vanity Fair*, 22 March 2007: 204). The practice of Lebanese female teenagers receiving nose surgery as their eighteen-anniversary present is so common that it can be equated with a rite of passage conducive to group membership. The glamorization of plastic surgery can be set within the wider context of a social phenomenon – "la frime"[15] – which, as early as 1999, *La Revue du Liban* dubbed as "une illusion de distinction".[16] Despite some criticism from within the Lebanese cultural *élites*, the obsession with one's look has generated a thriving business

[12] In a similar vein, as Kim (2003: 105) reports with reference to the situation in Korea, "while many women in America [justify] their choice to have cosmetic surgery in terms of individual empowerment, justice, entitlement, ownership of one's body and personal assertion of one's individual choice, [a young Korean-American woman's] explanation is strikingly different in that it attributes her choice to [interpreting the beauty ideal in terms of] conformity rather than individuality", which is the consumer-society version of the traditional Neo-Confucian habitus whereby the female body was to be invisible. Also see Gilmin 2006.

[13] www.ANAdiva.com (consulted Aug. 2011).

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] A French colloquial word meaning "deceitful appearance" aimed at impressing others and making oneself look interesting.

[16] N. Fayad Comair, "La frime au Liban. Inconscience, folie des grandeurs, défoulement ou distinction?", *La Revue du Liban* (26 Juin-3 Juillet 1999), 52-61.

in the medical sector:[17] Beirut has become the capital of touch-ups, a service now offered in many a travel package (see Fig. 1, featuring an Angelina Jolie lookalike as guarantor and promising a "Hollywood smile"), while banks are introducing loans for plastic surgery (Fig. 2).[18]

The tendency to exploit *la frime* is even more evident, of course, in commercial advertising proper which, as cursorily anticipated above, 'legitimizes' or 'normalizes' plastic surgery even when it comes to selling *crêpes* (Fig. 3) or whisky (Fig. 4). Eating out and (moderate) alcohol consumption are often presented as glamorous socializing activities in the West, too, where the reification of the female body to attract the male gaze and stimulate the desire to possess things, is a common selling strategy. Yet, what strikes the Western reader, here, is the Lebanese women's apparent complacency with, and uncritical acceptance of such a strategy – something which may be accounted for in terms of the 'localization' into a specific culture of such 'globalized' discourse practices (Campagna 2007; Hopearuoho, Ventola 2009). In other words, it looks as though framing women as the main protagonists and agents of the consumption process were conducive, *per se*, to women's empowerment.

In fact, in terms of grammatical agency proper, power only seemingly resides with the woman in Fig. 3 ("(you) come as you are", with the implicit "you" as Actor), who is exhorted to carry on her social life irrespective of her physical condition: see the imperative mood (proposal) contextualizing the related 'demand' picture (realized through direct gaze vector); in actual fact, rather than being exhorted, the woman is 'allowed' to "come as (she is)" by an external Agent (Halliday 1994: 163, 287): the latter is to be found outside the text, in the interaction order, and coincides with the text-maker as encoder of society's dictates and norms of appropriate behaviour.

In Fig. 4 ("plastic surgery made me fabulous"), power rests with the benefactive service (*plastic surgery*), which, from the point of view of transitivity, is constructed as Attributor (analogous to Initiator in a material process, see Halliday 1994: 165, 171) bringing about the attribution ([becoming] *fabulous*) encoded in the relational process with the (non-Western female) consumer as Carrier. In an ergative interpretation, plastic surgery as Agent "enables"[19] the woman in the ad ("me"), as Medium, to become *fabulous*. In Appraisal terms (Martin, White 2005), the choice of such an epithet encodes an attitudinal evaluation (sub-system: Appreciation) of the woman as a 'product' or 'artifact' (of plastic surgery) which conforms to mainstream (here, westernized) aesthetic principles. The ideologically-biased implicature is that only by conforming to society's aesthetic requirements is a woman legitimized, as the campaign slogan has it, to "live [her] way".

Following Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996: 207) analysis of the use of visual space, the structure of the ad in Fig. 4 is that of a triptych: according to the reading path which is typical of the Western culture, the woman('s fabulous face) occupies the domain of the Ideal and Given information, congruently presented as 'shared' and somewhat 'reified'; the slogan "live your way" is ideologically constructed as what can be achieved, in the ontological space of the Real and New information (also containing the packshot of the advertised product), through the agency of the Mediator (the headline, and more specifically the Attributor, i.e. "plastic surgery"). In the Lebanese (Arabic-speaking) culture, wherein a right-to-left reading path is more likely to be followed despite the use of English as a *lingua franca*, the information status and value (left-Given/right-New) of the elements in the triptych structure may tend to be 'localized', and thus interpreted in the reversed

[17] Although there are no clear statistics (www.plasticsurgery.org/Media/Statistics.html), plastic surgeons in Lebanon say they operate on thousands of patients every year, mostly for nose jobs and breast augmentation (www.lebanesedoctors.com/Pages/Specialties/PlasticCosmeticSurgeon.html).

[18] With "Beauty is no longer a luxury" as the campaign motto, First National Bank in Lebanon was the first in the country, in April 2007, to offer surgical loans.

[19] A causative of the reussive 'manage' (Halliday 1994: 287). Cf. the use of "enable" with a benefactive, paternalistic connotation as discussed in the analysis of gender roles and identities in a corporate advertising commercial for Total (Vasta 2010: 189-191).

order, with the claim posited as Given and the image of the woman as New.[20] Be that as it may, at the crossroads of verbal and non-verbal meanings, the synergic interplay of verbal headline, visual layout and psychological salience engages the addressee in a bi-directional investment of meaning (Cheong 2004: 176) which constructs a positive evaluation of the effects of plastic surgery as one of those 'things that cannot be denied': in Martin and White's (2005) terms, "plastic surgery made me fabulous" is a monogloss which does not allow for dialogic alternatives, a bare assertion "held to be unproblematic and generally 'known' or 'accepted' in the current communicative context" (White 2003: 263), an indisputable, factual version of events or states of affairs which constructs solidarity with 'the others' who are assumed to operate within the same value system (also see Tan 2010).

Shifting the analysis of Fig. 4 to a discourse-as-mediated-action level, and borrowing Burke's pentad of motives (1969) which Scollon and Scollon incorporate in their nexus analysis[21], it can be observed that the action of undergoing plastic surgery, performed by the guarantor with whom other women are supposed to identify, can be construed in terms of both/either an *agent motive* (she underwent plastic surgery because she likes to be fabulous) and/or (more probably) a *scenic*[22] *motive* (she underwent plastic surgery because of society's pressures to conform to a westernized look).

Even political discourse aimed, on the surface, at raising female citizens' awareness about their civil rights and mobilize responsible behaviour (see Fig. 5) seems to rest on the need to conform, as verbalized through an ambiguous ideational metaphor ("*sois belle* et vote"): at the interpersonal level of discourse, such a metaphor would seem to realize "synthetic personalization"[23], with a singling-out function and a strong focus on individuality and freedom of choice. This is achieved through the interpersonal resources of (imperative) Mood (proposal) and of two Appraisal systems (Martin, White 2005), namely those of Attitude (sub-system Appreciation [aesthetics])[24] and of Dialogic Engagement[25] (Contract:Proclaim:Pronounce), closing down or contracting the space for alternative positions. The androcentric, patronizing attitude implicitly "provoked" (Martin, White 2005) via the ideational metaphor "sois belle et vote" emerges even more clearly when the authorial voice is set within the wider context of multiple and competing discourses (cf. the colloquialism *Sois belle et tais-tois*, "be good and keep quiet"), at the interactional level of discourse as mediated action. The mediated action at issue here can be considered as a "semiotic aggregate" formed by "the intersections of multiple discourses and the interaction order in particular places" (Scollon, Scollon 2003: 167-8). More precisely, such multiple discourses (political, commercial, normative/behavioural) are combined and reframed in such a way as to "transform the original social practices in accordance with the goals and values of the recontextualizing practices of advertising agents and their clients" (Baldry, Thibault 2006: 213).

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[20] Similar observations may apply to the information value of the compositional elements of the bank loan ad in Fig. 2 above, which is presumably addressed to repeat customers and which congruently posits, from right to left, the brand name and logo as Given and the service offered as New, respectively.

[21] I.e. at the nexus of the individual habitus of the participants in the action, on the one hand, and the social matrix, on the other, which includes the discourses in place and the interaction order which organizes the participants in that action (see Scollon, Scollon 2003; Scollon 2005). Also see Fairclough (2006: 25): "When people act, represent and identify in texts (as parts of) events, they orient to more or less established and stabilized ways of acting, representing and identifying, which are parts of social practices, and therefore of orders of discourse".

[22] I.e. a motive in the scene outside her personal historical body.

[23] One of the two current changes in societal orders of discourse, viz. "a compensatory tendency", akin to 'simulated intimacy' (Baudrillard 1998), "to give the impression of treating each of the people handled 'en masse' as an individual" (Fairclough 1989: 62), which is typically realized, in verbal discourse, through pronoun choice ('you'), simulated dialogue, colloquialisms or forms imitating spoken language, humour, and the like. It works to counteract the homogenizing effect of advertisements and, indirectly, the commodification of the self, through what we may dub as the rhetoric of anti-rhetoric.

[24] A similar strategy was observed in the analysis of Fig. 4 above.

[25] Focusing on the resources by which the 'authorial voice' positions itself and negotiates with other voices and positions (see Martin, White 2005: 94; White 2005, 2006).

Thus, the authorial voice implicitly 'endorses' the embedded, dominant ideology and "aligns itself with some external voice which is represented as correct, authoritative or otherwise argumentatively compelling" (White 2005; Martin, White 2005: 97-98): this is the normative, institutional voice which posits collective participation in the exercise of civil rights as a duty but which, disquietingly enough, constructs the commodification of female beauty as a prerequisite (Given information[26]) for the right to visibility and protagonism within the 'we' group.

This is even more evident in a different ad taken from the same political campaign[27] ("*Sois égale* et vote"), where "synthetic personalization" is complemented by the other current change in societal orders of discourse identified by Fairclough, i.e. the "democratization of discourse"[28], fostering a sense of belonging to a group or 'being one among equals' and abiding by the hegemonic pressures to conform. To put it differently, here again *scenic motives* – viz. following high-contexting (i.e. collectivistic) cultural pressures to conform – override *agent motives.*

In sharp contrast with the 'artificial beauty' marketing strategies analyzed thus far is the "alternative role model" proposed by ANAdiva, an online community of Lebanese women who resist and challenge the mainstream commodification and standardization of female identity while advocating 'real beauty' as a function of one's own individual and ethnic traits (see Figs. 6 and 7). The posters and leaflets produced by ANAdiva on the occasion of the awareness-raising event called "Be yourself… or everyone else" (Sep. 20, 2009) juxtapose mass-produced, inanimate, glossy black dummies to the abstract, faceless yet potentially 'customizable' black silhouette of the 'alternative' woman (with the epithet significantly engraved in blue) represented in the ANAdiva yellow logo. The epithet 'alternative' is an evaluation of the proposed role model in terms of Appreciation [impact: noticeability], with a token[29] of positive Judgement [social esteem: normality] aimed at invoking the legitimization of ANAdiva's [+*marginal*] ideological stance.

The fact that the social legitimation of such a positively connoted 'alternative' model is implicitly invoked, rather than explicitly inscribed in the text, is in line with the overall discursive strategy, cursorily anticipated above, which characterizes the ANAdiva campaign: the resort to a culture-specific, non-confrontational, affective-intuitive "way of meaning" (Hasan 1984)[30] which instantiates the Arab appreciation for the highly persuasive, choreographic power of rhythm and sound epitomized in the Quran as the ultimate book of style. This relies heavily on "the power of words […] not to reflect human experience, but […] to transcend it, to reach toward that which l[ies] beyond human experience – the divine" (Walker Anderson 1997: 99), which also accounts for the choice of the group's name, ANAdiva. Thus, despite English being used as the *lingua franca* of global communication, ANAdiva's discursive actions appear to be mediated through, and firmly emplaced in the local culture. More specifically, on an ideal cline of 'attitudinal saturation' from explicitly inscribed to implicitly invoked meanings (Martin, White 2005: 48 *et passim*), the authorial voice strategically tends to distance itself from an outright condemnation of "plastic surgery" as the Agent responsible for the commodification and standardization of female identity.

In Fig. 6, in particular, causality and agency are obliterated altogether: the participant "plastic surgery" is deleted as the Agent responsible for "*drastic* physical alterations [caused by plastic surgery]", which are negatively connoted in terms of Appreciation [impact: noticeability], with a token of negative [+*irreversible*] Judgment [social sanction: propriety] with reference to sociocultural and attitudinal norms. What is relatively foregrounded, instead, is the active role assigned to "Lebanese women" as Sensers of a mental process of critical "think[ing]" and as

[26] See again the analysis of Fig. 4 and note 20 above.
[27] Not reproduced here for reasons of space.
[28] I.e. "the reduction of overt markers of power asymmetry" (Fairclough 1992: 98).
[29] I.e. an evaluation that is implicitly evoked, rather than explicitly inscribed in the text.
[30] With the proviso that "the definition of the boundaries of a culture is problematic. In the first place, there is the well-recognized fact that no culture is a homogene5ous, monolithic system any more than any language is. Secondly, the idea of congruence applied to culture as a whole can be misleading if one is left with the impression that congruence is synonymous with 'total lack of conflict in ideology and/or practice' (Hasan 1984: 106).

Possessors of the "individuality" which is "celebrated" [Affect: satisfaction: pleasure, with a token of Judgement: social esteem: normality] by a "dialogue" in which they are "encouraged" [Affect: inclination: security, with a token of Judgement: social esteem: capacity] to participate.

Plastic surgery is implicitly referred to, rather than explicitly mentioned, through a recurrent visual metaphor (visible in Figs. 8 and 9) which functions as an indirect attitudinal invocation, i.e. as a visual token, provoking rather than inscribing attitude: the sewing machine (in close-up and sharp detail) is interpretable, by analogy, as the Agent of the material process couched in the nominalization "mass production", which is "threatening our diversity" and which equates the female body with "tailor-made" clothing items. The sewing machine, metaphorically and metonymically associated *in absentia* to plastic surgery, is ascribed maximum salience[31] in the composition (Kress, van Leeuwen 1996: 212) as a function of its central position, relative size, colour contrast and sharpness of focus. As a consequence, it may be said to function as the "hyperthematic element" in the advertising campaign, triggering a coherent schematic frame of interpretation for the other elements in this and other related texts and "predict[ing] a particular pattern of thematic development" (Thibault 2000: 329). More precisely, the sewing machine instantiates co-actional, co-axiological and co-thematic intertextuality in that it non-verbally translates, negatively connotes, and metonymically construes "plastic surgery" as the implied Agent responsible for the commodification and standardization of the female body .

The only occurrences of "plastic surgery" in the entire ANAdiva campaign are found in the body copies of the texts reproduced as Figs. 9 and 10[32]. Unlike the other texts analyzed thus far, which were circulated as street posters and thus submitted to mass scrutiny and evaluation, Figs. 9 and 10 reproduce the leaflets which those who attended the awareness-raising ANAdiva event could take home with them and ideally ponder upon in the private space of their homes. Here is the body copy of the leaflet in Fig. 9:

> **Are we slowly being crippled by uniformity?**
> Are we actively sewing a mass-produced female society?
> What if you only become a worthy individual based on your appearance only and not your intellect or personality?
> YOU are a woman with an opinion, wit and character. Your traits are not a commodity; they are markers of your individuality.
> By claiming your identity suffocated by the standardization of beauty, you are holding on to what makes YOU unique.
> ANAdiva.com is a platform that celebrates the beauty of each woman as a unique individual with a distinct identity away from fabricated plastic personas.
> ANAdiva is NOT fighting plastic surgery but it is resisting the homogeneity of beauty.
> ANAdiva invites you to start the dialogue about a social issue that is threatening our diversity.
> Tonight, let the YOU shine in your beauty and your uniqueness… Because it is about YOU, not about anyone else.
> Log on to www.anadiva.com and speak your mind.

Once again, in order to engage with, and ultimately persuade, the putative, potentially dissenting reader, the authorial voice prefers adopting an affective-intuitive, relationship-oriented discursive style, rather than "construct[ing] a heteroglossic environment populated by different, competing views of whether [undergoing plastic surgery] is appropriate or not" (Martin, White 2005: 99), as would be more in line with the line-logic argumentative style typical of low-context cultures like the north-American one. The opening yes/no questions and the "what if" condition are marked by attitudinally-loaded, force-graduated lexis inserted in ideational metaphors based on the

[31] I consider salience as one of the visual counterparts to the verbal devices encoding the Appraisal system of Graduation.

[32] The text in Fig. 10 is not analyzed here for reasons of space. Here follows the body copy: "A sheep in a herd, following the flow, one of many, a uniform, an identity lost in the bubble, conformity, plastic surgery, enhancing, deforming, altering the shape and content to fit in, to fit in, TO FIT IN. To look desirable but not to act it, to work on the outside and neglect the inside, to search for happiness in reducing the idea of beauty in search of the perfect nose…"

'healthy/unhealthy', 'natural/artificial' distinctions (e.g. "are we *slowly* being *crippled* by uniformity", "are we *sewing* a mass-produced society", "…your identity *suffocated* by the standardization of beauty"). These metaphors construct emotional solidarity and a common ground for ideological positioning within the 'we' group, which includes the speaker as the Goal or Actor of negatively connoted, nominalized material processes ("uniformity", "mass-produced society", "standardization of beauty") in which the negative impact of plastic surgery is constructed as a state or event (i.e. in terms of its final result) rather than as an action.

"Plastic surgery" is first mentioned only in the final part of the body copy, when ANAdiva verbalizes its mission through an identity claim[33] ("ANAdiva is a platform that celebrates the beauty of each woman as a unique individual… away from fabricated personas") and ultimately unveils its ideological position. In so doing, the author uses a bare assertion ("ANAdiva is NOT fighting plastic surgery") which functions as a Contract: Disclaim: Deny, followed by a Counter: Pronounce ("but it is resisting the homogeneity of beauty"). In terms of interpersonal Engagement, the Disclaim: Deny categorically discards a conflicting position (see the contrastive function of intonation, typographically signalled by the capitalized word NOT) and aligns against "the putative addressee, specifically against beliefs which the writer assumes that at least some members of [her] mass audience will be subject to" (Martin, White 2005: 119).

In other words, the Disclaim implicitly invokes, and presents itself as responding to claims/beliefs that ANAdiva is actually against plastic surgery *per se* and thus in sharp ideological contrast with mainstream sociocultural values and beliefs.[34] To avert the risk posed by such a patently non-conforming interpretative frame, the immediately following Counter condenses and reiterates the identity claim. "Such Counter [is] aligning rather than disaligning in that [it] construe[s] the writer as sharing this axiological paradigm with the reader" (Martin, White 2005: 121): the text-maker takes a categorical stance (Contract: Proclaim: Pronounce) against the standardization of beauty, not against plastic surgery *per se*, as is testified, in the follow-up of the text, by a generic, superordinate expression – "a social issue [that is threatening our diversity]" – which seems to include, as co-meronyms, both "plastic surgery" and (any other technique fostering) "the homogeneity of beauty".

In the final analysis, the ideological position which ANAdiva women are asked not simply to subscribe to, but actively endorse by joining in the dialogue (i.e. by taking advantage of the right to "speak [their] mind[s]" granted by their online community), is a recognition of individuality as an 'alternative', albeit marginal, paradigm which relies heavily on the dualism of enforced versus freely chosen 'activity'. In the context of culture at issue, however, the journey to self-awareness and empowerment – i.e. to the social legitimization of a woman's freely chosen 'activity' to construct her individual, "unique" self in spite of (or, maybe, within) the strongly ingrained historical habitus to conform – starts with sharing attitudinal (viz. affective) evaluations of self-identity with other members of an alternative, marginal community which, for the time being, prefers to accommodate, rather than openly challenge, hegemonic positions.

4. In closing

Despite the inevitable limitations inherent in a short essay, it is hoped that the above discussion has shown that an intersemiotic approach integrating multimodal and discourse-as-mediated-action studies can offer an adequate platform to investigate "semiotic production in contemporary

[33] An "identity claim" is an "utterance in which individuals affirm their membership of specific social figurations or sub-groups in order to foreground them with reference to the matter in hand and thereby orient their audience's behaviour and expectations" (Riley 2002: 57).

[34] An alternative, more cautious reading of the Disclaim^Counter structure, which incorporates and accommodates hegemonic stances on plastic surgery, can be: 'ANAdiva is against plastic surgery inasmuch as it produces the homogenization of beauty'.

environments" and to account for "the role of the market in shaping a habitus of *agency-as-choice*" (Kress 2010: 132). Such an approach shifts the focus from the individuals involved in communication to social action and social change.

As O'Halloran and Lim perceptively point out (2009: 153), "we need to develop theories and practices to understand the relations between consumerism, identity and power in the digital age where transnational franchisers [but not only,] increasingly market their goods and services across multiple sites". What is even more important, we need to "set aside any a priori notions of group membership and identity and to ask instead how and under what circumstances concepts such as culture are produced by participants as relevant categories for interpersonal ideological negotiation" (Scollon, Scollon 2001: 544).

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APPENDIX

Fig.1

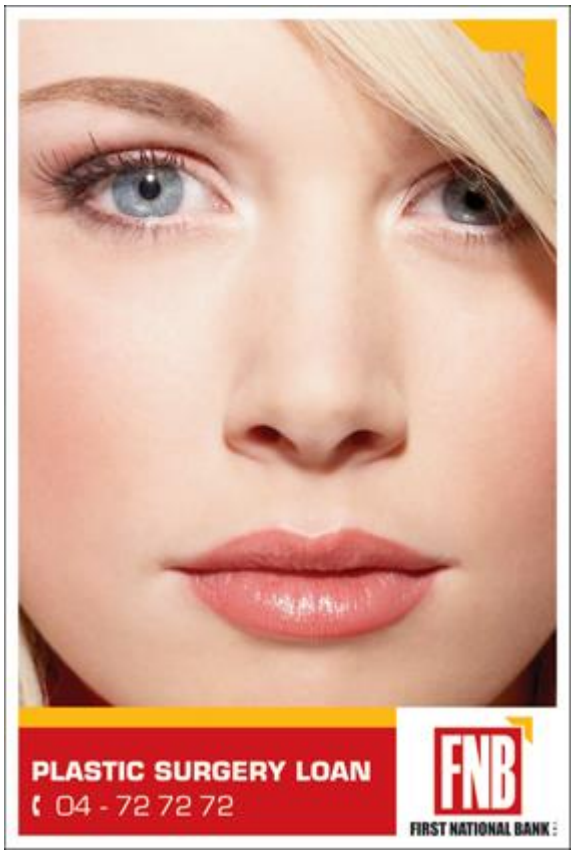
PLASTIC SURGERY LOAN
04 - 72 72 72
FNB
FIRST NATIONAL BANK

Fig. 2


CREPAWAY®
COME AS YOU ARE

Fig. 3


PLASTIC SURGERY
MADE ME FABULOUS
PIKASSO
Fig. 4


SOIS BELLE
ET VOTE
change-2009.com tayyar.org
ÉLECTIONS
2009
Fig. 5

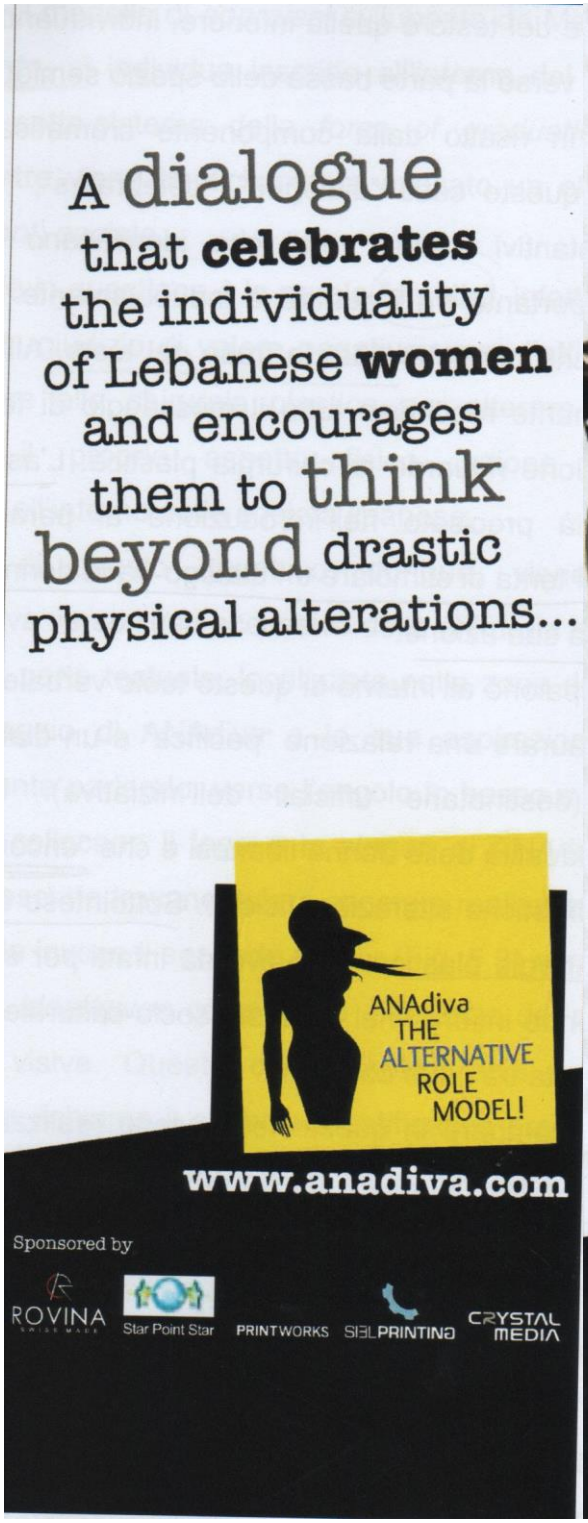
A dialogue
that celebrates
the individuality
of Lebanese women
and encourages
them to think
beyond drastic
physical alterations...
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Fig. 6


Your Traits
are markers
of individuality
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MEDIA

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

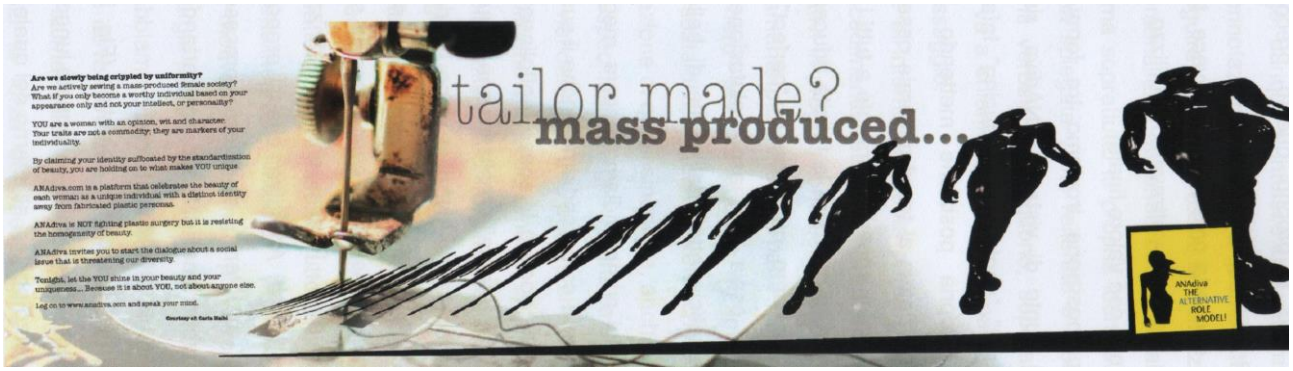

Fig. 9

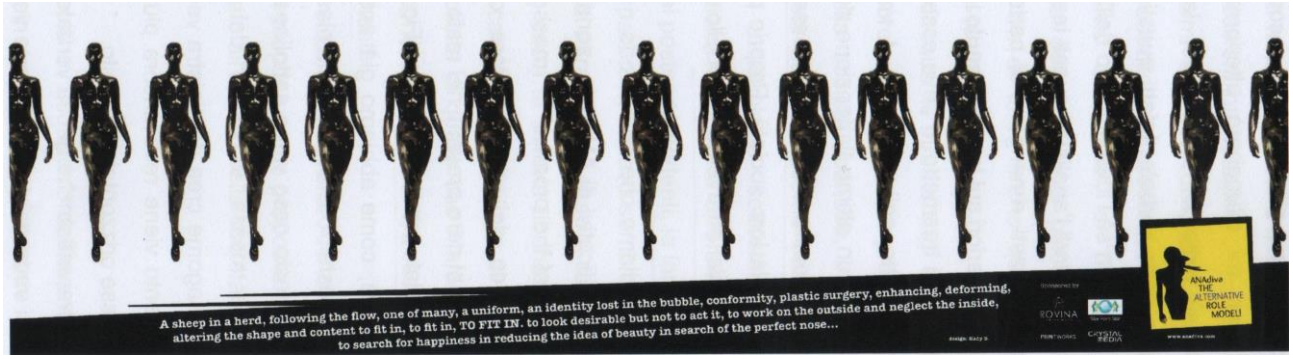

Fig. 10